

**Washington State Department Of Transportation
Washington State Ferries**

**Draft Long Range Strategic Plan
WTP Modal Plan for Washington State Ferries**

Briefing Paper
Prepared for the March 2006
Transportation Commission Meeting

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PURPOSE:

To provide a discussion on Washington State Ferries' Draft Long Range Strategic Plan, which is a modal plan component of the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP). The Commission will hear a full presentation on the WTP in April.

ACTION/OUTCOME:

This briefing is for information only and no action will be required of the Commission.

BACKGROUND:

The draft long range plan for Washington State Ferries is a service and investment plan for the years 2006 – 2030. Future cross sound travel needs are forecasted using transportation modeling techniques that are driven by regional demographics, primarily population and employment but also including assumptions on the capacity characteristics of both the ferry system and landside transportation systems. Population is projected to grow between 40 and 60 percent in the counties that Washington State Ferries link to the mainland; growth in employment in those counties is forecasted to grow at a slower rate. This drives an increase in overall ferry ridership by 70% by the year 2030. Vehicle traffic is projected to grow at a slower rate, 40%.

The projected growth in ridership is anticipated to result in levels of congestion at most ferry routes that will exceed the level of service standards adopted by the Transportation Commission in the mid-1990's. The plan was then developed to attempt to keep WSF's traffic congestion in line with those level of service standards as much as practical given a number of constraining considerations including landside infrastructure, navigational limitations, and the overall financial picture.

The draft plan proposes a series of vessel and terminal investments that build off WSF's current 10-year financial plan. The 2006 legislative session's direction concerning the role of WSF in providing passenger-only service and the number and size of vessels (four 144-car, 1,500 passenger vessels) in the upcoming vessel procurement program are taken into account. Current budget planning assumptions based on 2.5% fare increases starting in 2007 are also included. The plan provides a reference point for Washington State Ferries' long term service and financial needs that can be utilized by the Joint Legislative Task Force that will examine potential sources for ferry funding.

DISCUSSION:

The plan proposes a number of service changes and enhancements to meet future traffic demands. A second fleet of four new vessels (144-car, 1,500 passengers) will be required in the 2015 – 2018 time period, primarily to increase service capacity on several routes. These include:

- Adding a third vessel to the Edmonds/Kingston route in response to projected population increases in the North Kitsap and Olympic Peninsula service areas.
- Splitting up the Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth triangular ferry route by rerouting Southworth passenger and vehicle traffic to downtown Seattle instead of Fauntleroy. This will relieve pressure on the undersized Fauntleroy terminal in West Seattle by having it serve solely Vashon Island. This is primarily driven by increased demand in both passengers and vehicles from the South Kitsap area, although Vashon Island is projected to grow also, but at a slower rate.
- Adding a third vessel to the Seattle/Bremerton route in response to population increases in the Central Kitsap area.
- Adding a sixth vessel to the Anacortes/San Juan Islands/Sidney, B.C. service area in the peak summer months and evolving to a more direct “split route” service strategy to the San Juan Islands and minimize multi-stop vessels. During the fall and spring months, a fifth vessel would be added to the system to operate a schedule similar to what is provided now during the summer months.
- Passenger volume increases would require WSF to expand the passenger carrying capacity of the vessels serving the Seattle/Bainbridge Island route and rely on another operator to accommodate passenger growth from the North Kitsap area via a Seattle/Kingston passenger only service.

In the years 2022 - 2026, WSF would need to add six more 144-car, 1,500 passenger vessels in the fleet in order to retire four vessels and add two more to the system. The two additional vessels would be deployed as follows:

- Adding a year-round third vessel to the Mukilteo/Clinton route. WSF would be able to start adding a third boat in the summer months only by 2018.
- Adding a fourth vessel to the Edmonds/Kingston route by 2024. Adding a fourth boat allows some vessel swapping between that route and Seattle/Bremerton, resulting in larger vessels on the latter route.
- A second vessel would be added to the Port Townsend/Keystone route by 2025 during the summer months only. Although the assumption in the plan is that WSF would be able to utilize mid-sized Issaquah class vessels on the route, that could change based on the outcome of the Keystone terminal study underway.

The next steps in the process involve taking the draft plan to a series of public outreach meetings during the month of April for review and comment. WSF is on schedule to adopt a final plan simultaneous to the Commission’s adoption of the WTP in July.

RECOMMENDATION:

This briefing is for information only.

For further information contact Ray Deardorf, Planning Director, Washington State Ferries at 206.515.3491.